



Department of Justice

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HOGSETT ANNOUNCES VEEDERSBURG MAN CHARGED WITH ILLICIT SEXUAL CONDUCT WITH A MINOR

Hogsett Warns of the Dangers of Social Media

PRESS RELEASE

INDIANAPOLIS - Joseph H. Hogsett, United States Attorney, announced today that Erik S. Epperson, 22, Veedersburg, Ind., was charged last week with travel across state lines with the intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct, following an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation offices in both Terre Haute, Ind., and San Diego, Calif.

Erik S. Epperson traveled from Indiana to California after “chatting” with his 14 year old victim on Facebook. Even though Epperson realized his victim was only 14 years old, he was not deterred from continuing to befriend her, sending sexually explicit photos of himself via the internet.

Epperson traveled to San Diego in January of 2011, where he met the 14 year old at the San Diego International Airport. The two went to the house of the victim’s step-sister where they had sex on a couch. They had sex again the next morning and showered together.

In March 2011, the victim’s mother was contacted by a school resource officer who in turn reported the incident to San Diego FBI agents. Working together, the FBI in Terre Haute and San Diego agents researched the Facebook entries of Epperson and discovered other pictures that depicted the two together.

In July 2011, FBI agents served a search warrant at Epperson’s residence in Veedersburg, Ind. Upon his arrest, he admitted to their relationship and that he “fell in love with her and connected with her on a mature and intellectual level.” Epperson acknowledged the two corresponded regularly by Facebook, cell phone, and web cam and broke up because of the stress of the criminal investigation.

U.S. Attorney Joseph Hogsett said, “we must protect our children from predators who use social networking sites. Fourteen year olds are always victims because they cannot give consent to have sex, no matter what their maturity level is.” He implored parents to stay connected with their children and make their social networking activities a part of the daily family conversation.

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney Gayle L. Helart, who is prosecuting the case for the government, Epperson faces a maximum of 30 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. An initial hearing will be scheduled for in Indianapolis before a U.S. Magistrate Judge.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice. Led by United States Attorneys’ Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS), Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafefchildhood.gov.

An indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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